



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

4

# NRCS CALIFORNIA YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Fiscal Years  
2015–2018





# CALIFORNIA NRCS Vision Statement

To be recognized as technical experts in conservation planning and application that deliver programs and services that meet the needs of California's diverse agricultural and forestry landowners and operators for sustainability, resource protection, and environmental quality.

## Agency Priorities

- (1) Getting More Conservation on the Ground,
- (2) Increasing Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency, and
- (3) Creating a Climate Where Private Lands Conservation Will Thrive.

The purpose of the strategic plan is to help focus the work that needs to be accomplished over the next four fiscal years, and to leverage existing technical and financial assistance to do it.



## How will we use the Strategic Plan and what will it do?

- It will be a vision document that provides guidance and focus to the work that we do.
- It will help guide identification of measureable outcomes and how to achieve them.
- It will be the basis for annual business plans.
- It will help us identify key resource issues to address.
- It will focus on achievable goals over a four year period.
- It will be discussed semi-annually with the State Executive Leadership Team.

## MESSAGE FROM NRCS CALIFORNIA STATE CONSERVATIONIST

### CARLOS SUAREZ

Greetings,

The California NRCS Strategic Plan captures the priorities identified by our employees, partners and customers to continue delivery of sound voluntary conservation of our California natural resources on private land.

The plan describes in detail our strategic goals, objectives and actions we will be undertaking in the next 4 years to address these priorities. It is a guiding document that will serve to shepherd the heart and soul of our agency and its 400-plus agency staff and partners. In developing this guiding document, we took into consideration current and emerging natural resource issues and challenges that are a roadmap to addressing these strategic goals:

- Technical Competency
- Technical Credibility
- Quality of Operations
- Partnership Relationships
- Regulatory Engagement
- Emerging Resource Issues
- Program Delivery

These strategic goals take into consideration the sustainability of our natural resources and the resource concerns of water quality and quantity, air quality, and the health of cropland, forestland,

grazing land and soil. The strategic goals also address developing and emerging challenges such as renewable energy, drought, and climate change.

In a time of limited resources, increase in environmental regulations and changes in the ecosystem, I have no doubt this strategic plan sets forth the path to continue the high level of natural resources conservation our farmers

and ranchers deserve in order to continue being excellent stewards of the land while also meeting the needs of our employees that serve them.



A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carlos Suarez'.

Carlos Suarez  
State Conservationist

# 1 strategic goal

## Technical Competency

Employees will have the skill set to do their job.

### Objective 1.1

Provide employees with the necessary tools to develop specific skills and improve delivery of technical services.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Assist Field Offices to identify local resource concerns, assess current technical capacity at Team levels, and strengthen the delivery of locally focused technical trainings.
- Improve employee understanding and usage of the various sections of the Field Office Technical Guide and its application to program delivery.
- Build and distribute successful practice implementation models that guide technical staff in presenting conservation plan alternatives to clients.

### Objective 1.2

Support the allocation of time for employee professional development.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Expand focused training, job shadowing, detail assignment, and leadership development opportunities for new employees and provide a clear continuing education requirement for tenured employees.
- Strengthen NRCS performance standards to identify specific technical skills required by position and accurately gauge the skills of incumbents.
- Implement a position-centric training plan that new and experienced employees alike can follow to meet the requirements of their positions.

#### Outcomes:

- Employees are confident in assessing resource concerns and discussing farm production and management principles with the producer.
- NRCS clients and partners recognize the value of conservation planning and frequently request these services.
- Conservation technical assistance results in quality plans and timely implementation of recommendations.



# 2 strategic goal

## Technical Credibility

NRCS will be recognized as providing effective and practical solutions resulting in positive environmental benefits.

### Objective 2.1

Increase the evaluation and demonstration of innovative and emerging conservation technologies.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Build and strengthen technical partnerships to develop opportunities for information transfer to aid in practice standard creation and program policy development.
- Assess and integrate new technologies through increased field demonstrations, technical brochure creation, and deployment of innovative tools.

### Objective 2.2

Increase the visibility of NRCS as a technical leader in conservation activities.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Strengthen customer understanding of the value of NRCS tools and products that help save money, meet regulatory requirements, and achieve conservation objectives.
- Increase NRCS technical exposure in all available media that highlight successful program-neutral conservation projects, campaigns, and technical assistance.

#### Outcomes:

- Clients and partners recognize that NRCS actively evaluates and incorporates innovative technologies into practice standards and program offerings.
- NRCS is viewed as a principal resource for solving technical problems and emerging issues.
- Clients and partners recognize financial assistance programs as tools that incentivize the best, least-cost alternatives to solve natural resource problems that would otherwise not be addressed.





## Quality of Operations

Quality will be assured in all operational areas of the agency.

### Objective 3.1

Deliver technical services and financial assistance in a timely manner.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Simplify and efficiently deliver conservation program assistance to customers.
- Reduce, streamline, or re-assign repetitive administrative and reporting functions and time consuming technical activities, such as the National Resource Inventory and Ecological Site Descriptions.
- Increase investments in human resources to strengthen the quality and delivery of products and services.
- Adopt mobile technologies to improve communication while effectively delivering products and services to customers.

### Objective 3.2

Identify areas that need process improvement.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Strengthen the feedback mechanism between field staff and customers to state leadership and program managers.
- Identify inconsistencies in program delivery between offices, counties, and regions, as well as, amongst technical and program staff.
- Ensure that program support software is fully operational and field ready prior to delivery.

#### Outcomes:

- Technical staff is allowed more time to develop quality planning products using the best assessment tools while adhering to consistent program guidance.
- Quality of conservation planning activities results in program contracts that are technically justified and implemented on schedule.
- Customer feedback shows high satisfaction with timeliness and technical quality of service provided.



# 4 strategic goal

## Partnership Relationships

Build and strengthen partnerships with agriculture and conservation coalitions to meet common priorities.

### Objective 4.1

Maximize relationships to increase leveraging and sharing of resources.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Assist field offices to identify and build relationships with existing and new partners.
- Help build and support coalitions of public and private partners based on ecologic and industry needs.
- Increase collaboration and participation in field days and technical workshops organized by conservation partners.
- Support the allotment of time to build and strengthen state, regional, and local relationships with existing or new stakeholders.

#### Outcomes:

Complex environmental problems are addressed with the help of new and existing partnerships which enables:

- Efficient use of staff and leverages financial and technical resources more effectively
- Improves technical transfer with proven, partnered approaches.



# 5 strategic goal

## Regulatory Engagement

Assist landowners/operators to comply with regulations and engage with the regulatory community as policy and procedures are developed so that they are technically feasible to accomplish.

### Objective 5.1

Increase knowledge and awareness of regulations and permitting, and identify additional organizations that can provide technical assistance for regulatory compliance.



#### Strategic Actions:

- Improve field office staff and customer understanding of regulatory issues affecting clients.
- Increase staff knowledge of local agency and organization contacts that can assist with expeditious permitting of conservation projects.
- Build relationships with the regulatory community to identify issues and populations that need permitting and compliance assistance.
- Collaborate with regulatory agencies to provide coverage for anyone following NRCS standards and specs and minimize inconsistent local regulatory interpretations.

#### Outcomes:

- Employees feel competent in providing regulatory compliance assistance.
- NRCS can respond to requests for permit assistance and work with partners to develop coordinated permit processes.





## Emerging Resource Issues

Emerging issues will be identified, understood, and engaged in as resources are available.

### Objective 6.1

Expand technical knowledge, partnerships, and increase communication to address emerging issues.



#### Strategic Actions:

- Prioritize the current issues of climate change, groundwater contamination and depletion, and drought resiliency and educate staff to engage customers in incorporating adaptation and mitigation strategies into conservation plans.
- Solidify key partnerships and increase partner attendance at state and local technical meetings.
- Work with partners to provide staff training and workshops on practical adaptation and mitigation techniques that address emerging issues.
- Increase engagement with multi-agency technical centers and work with them to adapt existing NRCS technical services to the needs of California.
- Develop new practice standards, Conservation Activity Plans, and Technical Notes that focus on emerging issues.

#### Outcomes:

- Technical capacity is maximized guiding NRCS in addressing new and emerging issues and focusing resources at the field level.
- NRCS is recognized as relevant; able to quickly and effectively provide information, implement plans, and give technical assistance to address emerging issues.



# 7 strategic goal

## Program Delivery

Farm Bill programs and services and Conservation Planning 2.0 will be fully used as tools to implement conservation.

### Objective 7.1

Engage and inform clients on the importance of Conservation Planning as a foundation of program participation.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Increase leveraging of industry-specific partners to promote and demonstrate the utility and value of Conservation Planning.
- Strengthen technical and planning partnerships with groups focused on small farms and other under-served communities.

### Objective 7.2

Conservation Planning guides program participation, policy and procedure development, and quality implementation.

#### Strategic Actions:

- Reduce redundancies in program delivery to allow planners the time to assist producers with the technical aspects of planning and practice implementation.
- Strengthen program screening criteria that prioritize shovel-ready conservation plans.
- Provide post-obligation design, construction, and implementation support to planners.

#### Outcomes:

- Program delivery is supported by quality conservation plans that are completed in a timely manner prior to program funding and contracting.
- Technical specialists and planning and administrative resources are more robust and readily available to field staff.
- All customers including underserved communities utilize NRCS planning and technical services before seeking financial incentives.







 Helping People Help the Land





*“By bringing in new partners to the conservation mission, enhancing our scientific and technical foundation, and strengthening our conservation delivery system we will expand our ability to deliver world-class results for farmers and ranchers, local communities, and the environment.”*

— NRCS Chief Jason Weller

Helping People Help the Land



Natural Resources Conservation Service

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